THE VVAY TO A BLESSED ESTATE IN *THIS LIFE.*

BY

EZEKIEL CVLVERVVELL.

LONDON,
Printed by *John Dawſon*, for
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HAT which our Lord Jesus from Heaven writ unto the Church of *Sardis; Thou hast a name that thou livest, but art dead*, may be truly spoken of the greater sort of not counterfeit Professors of the Faith in our time: for it is cleare by the Text, that this is not spoken of hypocrites, who are starke dead, but of such who having some life Rev. 3. 1.

remaining in them, are in a dead sleepe; for these of whom I speake, take good paines to keepe up a name of Christianitie, both in the exercises of Religion, and in their outward behaviour, (though in both there be much failing,) but in very truth there is but a little life of faith and love in all their Profession, as may appeare in their cold and uncomfortable prayers, in their wandering and drowsie hearing of the Word, and unfruitfull receiving of the Sacraments, and much more in their abuse and neglect of the secret exercises of Prayer, reading, and meditation by themselves, and conference with others, seldome deepely bewayling their estate, lesse rejoycing in the assurance of their salvation by Christ, as seldome delighting in God, with a zeale to set forth his glorie in every part of their life.

Though

Though this be the state of the greater part of those that have some truth of grace in them, yet may we say againe, that there are with us, (as in the Church of *Sardis*) *a few names that have not defiled their garments*; that is, doe live unrebukable, & walke worthy their holy calling, having a sweet feeling of Gods favour unto them, and so can boldly come unto him in time of need, with assurance that hee doth graciously respect them, their prayers, and unfained obedience; who likewise doe more delight themselves in God, then in all earthly things, accounting it their greatest griefe to offend him, and greatest joy to please him; possessing their soules with confidence & patience in their greatest tryals, looking for the appearing of Christ.

This is that blessed estate to be injoyed in this life, which God

hath prepared, (though in divers measures) for the faithfull, all which may well be contained in this short sentence of the *Psalmist*, Psa. 37.4. *Delight thy selfe in the Lord, he will give thee thy hearts desire*: which I doubt not but all true Christians (when they have well considered it) would be glad to attaine unto: But either through ignorance of the way how to attaine it; or through negligence; not putting in practice what they know: they spend many yeares, either securely, or uncomfortably; seldome attaining to that heavenly feasting, which (if they were wise) might be their daily refreshing: whose estate I much tendring, doe endevour to shew them, how this happie life may be attained; which I conceive to be onely by a more plentifull feeding upon Christ by faith. It is without question, that all and every part

of

of our spirituall life is in Christ, *of whose fulnesse wee receive grace for grace*: and this is as cleare that we receive no grace first or last from Christ, but by beleeving: in which respect Christ is truely and principally said to be our spirituall food, and beleeving to be the true feeding upon him. Which being so, it necessarily followes; that feeding seldome, or weakely, we cannot have much spirituall strength: and otherwise feeding plentifully and soundly, we shall be fat and flourishing in grace, and so attaine unto the blessed life spoken of. Ioh 1. 16. Ioh. 6. 27. 34, 35

For the better understanding and practising whereof, this is specially to be considered: How every true beleever may daily, yea, oft in the day, by faith feed upon Christ, that so he may receive from him all spirituall nourishment, for his refreshing and strengthening to every good worke. How to feed oft in the day on Christ.

This is done by setting before us those sweet promises, which God hath made to us, for the strengthening of our faith in all our necessities: and, so particularly to apply them to our selves. Whereby we may comfortably assure our selves, that we shall enjoy that which God hath promised. Wherein we are first to get the true meaning of that which is promised.

Secondly, To see we have a good warrant, that this is promised to us, that thereupon we may conclude, we shall certainly enjoy that which God hath promised, seeing he is faithfull who hath promised.

Examples. But seeing this is not well conceived by many, I will make it plain by example. 1 *Cor.* 1. 30. it is said; *But of him are yee in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisedome, and righteousnesse, and sanctification, and redemption.* In which is as much said

said as may be conceived, or desired; the meaning whereof is, that every true beleever, is by Gods spirit made a living member of Christ Jesus, from and in whom, he is made by God a true partaker of all things needfull to salvation: that whereas he is by nature fooliſh, guiltie, filthy, and in bondage, now in Christ he is made perfectly wiſe, righteous, holy, freed from all his enemies, and ſo reſtored to full happineſſe. This promiſe of God being clearely underſtood, muſt now bee applyed particularly by every beleever to himſelfe, thus: Seeing God who is all-ſufficient, and faithfull, hath in his Word, which is Truth it ſelfe, promiſed theſe great benefits (in which all are contained) to every true beleever, therefore I who doe truely, though weakely, beleeve in Christ, may boldly aſſure my ſelfe, that all theſe be mine, and

therefore I shall not want any thing needfull, for my present comfort, or eternall happinesse. Which whosoever doth daily practise in this manner to maintaine, and increase his Faith by application of this, and all other of Gods promises, he shall daily more and more enjoy in this life that blessed estate we speake of.

Pray for Faith.

But for as much as faith is the gift of God, and we cannot further beleeve then wee be drawne by Gods spirit, therefore we must joyne often, and fervent prayer; that God by this meanes would increase our faith.

Not easie.

This may seeme easie to be performed, but upon better tryall, it will not be found so easie to doe it effectually; for besides our own great untowardnesse to beleeve, I cannot thinke of any dutie, wherein our common Adversary will use more

cunning,

cunning, and diligence to hinder us, then in this: either by keeping us from the worke, or beguiling us in it: whereby it comes to passe, that very few doe (to any good purpose) practise the same.

Amongst many lets which hinder the faithfull practice hereof, I observe these two, in two divers sorts of beleevers. The former in those, who not sufficiently feeling their wants, and too much contented with their estate, doe not so prize Christ and this blessed estate in him, as may move them to take this paines, and therefore never reach unto this growth in grace, whereunto they might come, if the fault were not in themselves.

Too chiefe lets.

1. Not prizing Christ.

The other let is in those who highly prizing the benefit, and earnestly labouring for it, are by the sense of their owne unworthinesse, so kept downe, that

2. Our unworthines.

that they cannot with any hope looke up, for so great a blessing.

For the remooving of both these lets, the first sort are to bethinke themselves, what an uncomfortable account it will be, when God shall call them to it, to see how many yeares they have spent, with little growth in grace, either to the glory of God, or good example to others, or to the peace of their owne soules. Whereas on the other side, they might have attained unto such a sweet life, as would have beene a heaven upon earth: namely, *To rejoyce alwayes in the Lord.*

For the other poore soules, who are kept downe with the sense of their owne unworthinesse, they are to know, that all Gods promises are free and undeserved, so as no unworthines ought to hinder them from beleeving: yea, rather they that have

have the most sense of their owne unworthinesse, have most incouragements to beleeve, for the voyce of Christ, *Come unto me all you that are weary and heavie laden, and I will ease you*, serves not onely for our first conversion, but in all our distresses whatsoever, throughout the whole course of our life. Mat 11.

If any escape both these lets, and goe about this worke, then will Satan use all his skill to beguile both sorts; such as are weake and heavie hearted, soone discouraged, he tempts and perswades, they labour in vaine, and doe not beleeve, when indeed they doe, as shall appeare. The other sort who are too well conceited, & light-hearted, Satan labours to perswade, that they have more faith then indeed they have, and that their case is better then in truth it is.

It

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Remoove of the first let.

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It

It shall be therefore the wisedome of all who shall not be deceived, carefully to examine & try themselves; which that they may the better doe, let them consider of these markes that follow: whereby either sort may certainely judge of themselves.

Foure markes of faith not seene.

For such as conscionably endevour to nourish their faith in such manner as hath beene shewed, and yet finde no comfort, but feare they doe not beleeve, (when as indeede they doe) these are to discerne their faith by such secret operations, as doe certainely shew faith to be there, though it be not seene: namely, An unfeigned griefe for the want of faith, with an unceassant endevour for the attaining of it. Againe, A reverent esteeme of God, and heartie affection of unfained love to him, which cannot be without some former apprehension of

1. Griefe for want of Faith.

2. Constant labour for it.

3. True love to God.

Gods

Gods love to them, which is in many, (though they see it not.) And lastly. A tender Conscience, fearing to displease God, even in smaller matters, which others little regard. Whosoever shall finde these fruits, (which cannot come but from faith) may certainly know, that there is a roote of faith grounded in their hearts, though they see it not. But such as have no feeling of their faith, and see no such effects in their lives, have just cause to thinke that they have no faith at all.

4. A tender conscience.

No fruits no faith.

As for the other sort, who are too well perswaded of themselves, that they finde comfort in meditating on Gods promises, whereas indeed they deceive themselves, and have not that faith they imagine, as their fruits doe shew.

Notes of true and false comfort.

This may be discerned by these notes.

First, True comfort is usually

1. True hardly

ly very hardly gotten, with much prayer and labour, and it is oft a long time before this be fully; therefore they who upon their full thoughts on these promises, finde comfort that they have part in them, may so farre mistrust, all is not sound, till they shall see some better proofe thereof: which if they do not, but for all this will be confident, that all is well, it is to be feared, their comfort is not sound.

For this is another propertie of that true comfort, which springs from faith, especially in young and weake beleevers, that they (so highly valuing the benefit) are very fearefull of being deceived, and must see good evidence before they will be perswaded, that they have this saving faith.

Whereof if they shall be perswaded, yet therewithall is joyned such a feeling of the weakeneſſe

nesse of their faith, and so of all grace, as makes them poore in their own eyes, and mourne for their wants, thinking lowly of themselves, and more highly reverencing the graces of God in others. Whereas they who be deceived, are as the *Laodicians*, rich and wanting nothing, and so be merry, and too light-hearted, thinking too well of themselves, and too slenderly of others better then themselves.

4. Hunger and labour for more.

Another sure marke of sensible faith and comfort, is this: That they that have tasted of it, can never be satisfied, but still hunger and labour for more: none more diligently use all good meanes to grow in grace then they: Even as the strong and most healthfull bodie, doth feed better then the weake and sickly. But such as being well satisfied with that they have, and feele no hunger, nor labour for more, it is evident their faith and